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End of an era: CD Baby stops distributing artists' CDs, vinyl, and other goods

After more than 25 years, the digital-focused service is closing its warehouse.

KEVIN PURDY - 5/23/2023, 12:46 PM



CD Baby

Enlarge / CD Baby no longer sells or distributes CDs but will help an artist figure out how much to charge for their discs.

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CD Baby, an online indie music pioneer and the go-to place for indie music artists looking to get their music into storefronts, has told its customers that it will no longer distribute physical goods, like CDs, after June 22, 2023.

As seen on [Twitter](#), on [music blogs](#), and in its [Help section](#), the Portland, Oregon-based distributor of independent music will continue to help artists get their music onto the digital stores of Spotify, Amazon, and Apple. But as of June 22, CD Baby will no longer warehouse, ship, or distribute CDs, vinyl, cassette tapes, or DVDs to Amazon or music wholesaler Alliance. Once artists with inventory in CD Baby's warehouse receive notice, they'll have 60 days to decide whether to get their inventory shipped back to them or have it recycled.

Like other services that date back to the late-1990s dot-com boom, CD Baby has gradually shifted away from its namesake offering. Launched from Woodstock, New York, in 1998 by Derek Sivers, it was one of the first web-based CD stores that focused on selling independent artists' work. By 2009, according to the company, physical sales through its store accounted for only 27 percent of the revenue it paid out to artists.

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At the same time, CD Baby was already an active presence in the shift to digital music, being one of the iTunes Store's launch partners. The service showed up in Ars features about the brave new world of licensed music downloads: about indie bands forgoing labels and going directly to their fans; Radiohead's Thom Yorke suggesting in 2008 that artists had better retain their streaming rights going forward; and Google opening its own music store in 2011. If there was a place to buy music online, CD Baby was almost certainly distributing it.

During digital music's heyday, CD Baby was acquired by one of its CD and DVD manufacturing partners, Disc Makers, for \$22 million. CD Baby was acquired again in 2019 for \$200 million by music publishing firm Downtown. By that point, the company had paid out \$600 million to artists during its lifetime.

At that time, CD Baby's physical retail sales through its store were less than 3 percent of what it paid to artists. CD Baby announced it would close its online store and "focus on what is making a difference for musicians today: our distribution, monetization, and promotion services." Three years later, CD Baby can still help you make a CD, partnering with its former owner, but you're on your own in moving it.

"It's been an honor to help so many artists like you sell CDs, vinyl, cassettes, and DVDs for the past 25+ years," CD Baby wrote in its letter to artists this week. "As we turn this page in our history, we look forward to continuing to help you digitally distribute, market, and earn money from your music."

Listing image by CD Baby

READER COMMENTS

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Unsolved Mysteries Of Warhammer 40K With Author Dan Abnett

Unsolved Mysteries Of Quantum Leap With Donald P. Bellisario

Today "Quantum Leap" series creator Donald P. Bellisario joins Ars Technica to answer once and for all the lingering questions we have about his enduringly popular show. Was Dr. Sam Beckett really leaping between all those time periods and people or did he simply imagine it all? What do people in the waiting room do while Sam is in their bodies? What happens to Sam's loyal ally Al? 30 years following the series finale, answers to these mysteries and more await.



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